Convivencia vs. Race: On the Dangers of Extracting Morality from History

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This is an essay about the yearning of historians to find in the past exemplary lessons that might guide their own societies toward visions of the good. The essay will itself proceed by example: that of historical writing about a medieval Iberian society in which the coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews produced two words, *raza* (race) and *convivencia* (living with, dwelling together), with their associated concepts. Historians of Iberia have generally treated these words and concepts as moral opposites. I will instead suggest that they are locked in intimate embrace.

Let us start with the word convivencia, since the concepts the term encompasses feel less familiar for most historians. The Spanish word means literally "living with," but it has become a term of art among students of the Iberian Peninsula, designating specifically the living together of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The word has come to stand (not without controversy) for a distinctive attribute of medieval society and culture that gave enduring shape to the possibilities of life and thought in the Iberian world. That world, we should not forget, extended in some early modern centuries over a large part of the globe, including much of Europe, the Americas, and even parts of Asia and Africa.

If convivencia simply meant living together, or living together in Iberian contexts, it would probably not be the object of much discussion. But often enough, the possibilities of coexistence understood within the concept of convivencia are specifically valued positively. To pick a nonprofessional but influential example, the English-language Wikipedia page for "La Convivencia" defines it thus:

> An academic term, proposed by the Spanish philologist Américo Castro, regarding the period of Spanish history from the Muslim Umayyad conquest of Hispania in the early eighth century until the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. It claims that in the different Moorish Iberian kingdoms, the Muslims, Christians and Jews lived in relative peace. According to this interpretation of history, this period of religious diversity differs from later Spanish and Portuguese history when—as a result of expulsions and forced conversions—Catholicism became the sole religion in the Iberian Peninsula.[1]

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The concept has expanded from "peaceful tolerance in Iberia," and is today sometimes applied to encounters of Christians, Muslims, and Jews not only in Iberian realms but wherever members of those religions live in proximity, or indeed to think about coexistence wherever diverse peoples are found.[2]

A seemingly empirical question can begin pointing us toward some of the problems that attend the term. Was medieval Iberia, or at least medieval Iberia under Islamic hegemony, a place marked by a more peaceful coexistence of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity than that seen in other places and histories? Different scholarly communities have provided different answers to that question. The broad consensus of Arabists working in Spain in the generation or two since the end of General Franco's regime—scholars such as Eduardo Manzano Moreno, Maribel Fierro, Manuela Marín, and others—would suggest not. In fact, contemporary Spanish scholars of Iberian Islam rarely deploy the concept of convivencia (or, for that matter, *raza*). On the contrary, their work has long manifested an allergy to such concepts, dismissing them as generalizations and essentializations, and focused instead on elucidating particular circumstances.[3]

Thus, for example, Eduardo Manzano points out that the Umayyad caliphs of Cordoba, the Islamic dynasty (929–1031) glorified for its tolerance by the North American scholar María Rosa Menocal, presented themselves not as protectors of diversity but as zealous guardians of orthodoxy. It was under their rule that much of the Christian population of al-Andalus converted to Islam, that the followers of the philosopher Ibn Masarra were viciously repressed, that the library assembled by one caliph (al-Ḥakam) was burned by another (al-Manṣūr/Hishām II). As for Umayyad tolerance of Jews, Manzano stresses how

1 Wikipedia, s.v. "La Convivencia," last modified 11 April 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Convivencia (last accessed: 28 April 2022). Anglophone readers seeking a fuller bibliography may turn to a number of recent articles, including Novikoff, "Between Tolerance and Intolerance"; Soifer, "Beyond *Convivencia*"; Wolf, "*Convivencia* in Medieval Spain"; Akasoy, "*Convivencia* and Its Discontents"; Szpiech, "Convivencia Wars."

2 My arguments in this paper were originally presented as part of one such discussion, the conference "Convivencia in the Mediterranean: Early Modern Perceptions, Practices, and Limits in Dealing with the Religious Other," held at the Selma Stern Center at Potsdam University in November 2021. I am grateful to Sina Rauschenbach and Susanne Härtel for the invitation to participate, and to participants for their comments and suggestions. At its most expansive, Castro's convivencia has even been characterized as the invention of tolerance: Valero Moreno, "Américo Castro."

3 In addition to the article by Manzano discussed below, readers may begin with Fierro, "Convivencia: ¿Un concepto útil?"; García-Arenal, "Américo Castro en Estados Unidos"; Rodríguez Mediano, "Feeling of History."

little we know about the condition of Jewish communities under the Umayyads, apart from the successful career of one Jew, Hasday b. Shaprut.[4]

He could have added that the same ambivalence is evident in every later Islamic regime in Iberia. In the Taifa kingdoms that succeeded the Umayyad caliphate, for example, one Jew did reach the rank of vizier or prime minister in a particular time and place (the famous Samuel b. Naghrela in Granada circa 1038), while a generation later his son Joseph and much of the Jewish community of the kingdom were massacred by their Muslim neighbors. The most eminent Muslim scholar of that age, Ibn Ḥazm, could engage in extended comparative study of Christianity and Judaism while at the same time suggesting that Islam should no longer tolerate the ongoing presence of adherents of either religion—or indeed any *dhimmī* at all—within its borders. A version of that vision would in fact be implemented by the Almohad caliphate (c. 1121–1269), which decreed that Christians and Jews living in its Iberian and North African domains must convert to Islam or face death.[5] Entire Jewish and Christian communities were converted, probably among them the family of the young Maimonides (then of Cordoba, later of Fez, and finally of Egypt).[6]

It is evident that, as Manzano puts it, "recourse to violence was an element always latent in the societies of al-Andalus."[7] But perhaps if we cannot speak of convivencia in Iberian Islamic society generally, we can find it in some specific cultural sphere within the larger society? Some partisans of the concept, most notably Américo Castro and María Rosa Menocal, looked to poetry for their examples, finding evidence of convivencia in the deep influence of Arabic poetics on Christian and Jewish poets. But as Sarah Stroumsa points out in *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain*, the poetic relationship was asymmetrical. Arabic poetry influenced Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus, but not the other way around. Should we call this convivencia, or colonialism?[8]

4 Manzano Moreno, "Qurtuba"; Menocal, *Ornament of the World*.

5 On Ibn Ḥazm and his relevance to Almohad minority policies, see Wasserstein, "Intellectual Genealogy." On the wider debate about whether non-Muslims should be allowed to reside within the Almohad domain, see Fierro, "Muslim Land." Fierro has produced much work relevant to this question, much of it gathered (and ably translated into English by Jeremy Rogers) in Fierro, *Almohad Revolution*; see, for example, 234 and 236, where she stresses that ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, the first Almohad caliph, who reigned 524–558/1130–1163 and whose reign initiated the worst persecution of the *dhimmī*s, "was favorable to Zahirism," and that the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 580–595/1184–1198), who was similarly inclined, visited the tomb of Ibn Ḥazm.

6 On the debate over whether or not he converted, refer to Stroumsa's *Maimonides in His World* 56–60.

7 Manzano Moreno, "Qurtuba" 239.

8 Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad* 15, 85–89.

Stroumsa therefore sets aside poetry and looks instead to philosophy. She sees in the history of al-Andalus a series of golden ages for "the free flow of ideas in both directions" between Muslim and Jewish philosophers. She does not minimize religious, social, or economic conflicts between Muslims and Jews. But she argues that if we look specifically at the exchange of philosophical ideas, we can see how shared ideals, common ground, and even friendships between Muslim and Jewish speculative philosophers produced "interconnected values."[9]

It is perhaps a coincidence that Américo Castro himself characterized convivencia with similar words, as a "mesh of interconnected values," though he did not assign philosophy an important role among those values, perhaps because he had drunk deeply from romantic critiques of rationalism.[10] Stroumsa stands on ground that is both narrower (philosophy) and firmer. After all, many (though not all) medieval Muslim, Christian, and Jewish philosophers shared the assumption that the ultimate foundations of reason are one and universal. Her goals, too, are much more specific than Castro's. She seeks not to describe "the Spanish people" but only to help us realize the important place occupied by Jews in the emergence of philosophical ideas in the Muslim West, as well as the reverse (which has more often been recognized), namely, the influence of Islamic thought on Jewish philosophy. (Stroumsa does not include Christians in her argument, because she does not think that they played a significant role in the philosophical debates of al-Andalus.)

These arguments shed much light on relations between Jewish and Islamic philosophers and philosophy in al-Andalus. But Stroumsa is right to stress that in making them, she does not seek to contribute to the claims of those who see a positive convivencia as a distinctive attribute of Islamic Iberia. Why not? She does not dwell on her reasons for avoiding an endorsement of convivencia, but one such might well be that philosophy is itself just as capable of generating sectarian intolerance as it is of generating pluralist tolerance.

In part, this is because philosophers do not always agree on who is or is not one of them. Is Ibn Ḥazm, with his many writings against the toleration of Christians and Jews, to be counted as a philosopher, or can we exclude him as a theologian, legal theorist, bellettrist, or any of many other things? The question of who is and who is not a philosopher was as contested in the Middle Ages as

9 Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad* 168. We could interpret as evidence either for or against this thesis a Sevillan market inspector's prohibition on Muslims selling "books of science" to Jews, lest they translate them and pass them off as their own: Ibn ʿAbdūn al-Ishbīlī, *Risāla fī l-qaḍā' wa-l-ḥisba* 248.

10 Castro, *Structure of Spanish History* 31.

it was in Greek Antiquity, and as it remains today. Chief among the reasons for that contestation is disagreement, even among those who believe in the unitary foundations of reason, about what those foundations might specifically be. Appeals to reason can just as easily produce partisanship as they can concord. As the Andalusī philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl famously put it, "'men of sound reason' are simply those whose minds work the same way."[11]

But even if the sectarian tendencies of philosophers could be overcome, the ideal of a philosophical convivencia would still rest on a one-sided view of the powers of reason. It has been a recurring dream of philosophers from antiquity to the present that a fully rationalist philosophy would create a community of discourse capable of including participants of all different faiths, since all share in human reason. But that dream has also always been accompanied by nightmare, for the boundaries of the rational can exclude as well as include (sometimes even both simultaneously), shattering the possibilities of coexistence as well as creating them.

This was certainly the case in Islamic Iberia. To choose but one example: The teachings contained in *The Book of Ibn Tūmart*, ascribed to the founder of the Almohad movement, must count as among the most influential texts in the history of philosophy in the West.[12] For several centuries those teachings shaped the possibilities for religious and philosophical thought not just for Muslims (such as Averroes) but also for Jews (such as Maimonides) throughout a vast empire that included much of the Iberian Peninsula as well as Northwest Africa. They were deeply rationalist, insofar as they insisted on the believer's responsibility to use reason to attain knowledge of God's oneness, and maintained the inherent ability of every human to achieve that rational knowledge.

It was this very insistence on the power of reason that provided the philosophical underpinning for the Almohad position that Jews and Christians (as well as Muslims who did not share the Almohads' particular interpretations of God's oneness) who refused to convert should be killed, since they were resisting truths evident to human reason. In other words, we might want to see the Almohads as an example of rationalist thought producing the destruction of convivencia, rather than serving as an example of it. (Perhaps that is why

11 Goodman, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* 151. Stroumsa herself on occasion decides whom to count in or out. In addition to Ibn Ḥazm, she excludes "the faqih Bundūd, who although described as Averroes' disciple, cannot be counted as a philosopher" (Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad* 140 n. 58) and the "semi-philosophical" Ibn Ṭāhir (135).

12 There are three editions of the works attributed to Muḥammad b. Tūmart, by ʿAmmār Ṭālibī, J.D. Luciani, and ʿAbd al-Ghanī Abū l-ʿAzm. The most recent scholarship I know of is Daniel Watling's illuminating 2021 dissertation, *Dearest Desire*.

recent historians tend to minimize Ibn Tūmart's interest in philosophy, as well as that of his caliphal successors, despite what their biographers claimed.[13]) Anna Sapir Abulafia has argued that the influx of rationalist philosophy in twelfth-century Christian Europe had a similar effect, supporting arguments that insofar as the Jews refused to recognize Christ they were not only stubborn but inhumanly irrational.[14]

In short, medieval philosophy, whether Islamic, Jewish, or Christian, Neoplatonist or Aristotelian, is just as capable of generating arguments for exclusion as for inclusion, of supporting the possibilities of coexistence and of destroying them, and often enough we can find both potentials being actualized at the same time, as we do in the Almohad example. When we as historians assign a specific valence—whether positive or negative—to a particular practice in a specific time or place, that assignment is often the product of what we want to see or what we happen to have focused on (which is also to say, of what we have ignored). A different yearning or a different focus could have produced a very different valence.

If, for example, what interests a historian of philosophy is the impact of Almohad thinkers such as Ibn Tūmart or Ibn Rushd on Maimonides's efforts to interpret the teachings of Moses in ways consonant with philosophical reason, they may focus on constructive influence (as Stroumsa did magnificently in her book *Maimonides in His World*). But if we wish to understand what Maimonides had in mind when he wrote that of all laws and peoples Islam was the one that had most persecuted and harmed the Jews, then we might take a different approach.[15] Perhaps the case of Maimonides might even remind us that our historical subjects were as ambivalent in their judgments about the world they lived in as we ourselves are. Just as we cannot consistently agree among ourselves, or even within ourselves individually, about whether we live in good times or bad, we should not expect to make easy judgments about the valence of the past. The judgments of the inhabitants of those times, important as they are, cannot offer clarity. After all, even people who live in a golden age can complain that everything looks yellow.

This is an exceedingly general point. Rather than attempt to defend it, this essay will limit itself to the argument that the emergence of the concept of convivencia in Iberian historiography has always involved choices, and that in fact

13 Stroumsa, for example, suggests that those biographers presented the Almohads as patrons of philosophy as part of a propagandistic effort to portray them as enlightened rulers: *Andalus and Sefarad* 134–147.

14 Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*.

15 Maimonides, "Epistle to Yemen" 126.

the term itself emerged as a conscious alternative to another potent concept that has also structured powerful narratives of Iberian history but with a very different moral valence today—namely, the concept of race.

As with any history, there have long been multiple master narratives available for the multicultural history of Spain, with different valences. Compare, for example, Johann Gottfried von Herder's (1744–1803) vision of the historical consequences of Muslim and Christian coexistence in Iberia: "Spain was the fortunate region where the first spark of a returning culture struck Europe, which then had to adapt itself to the place and the time in which it came alive. The history of these events reads like a comforting fairy tale." In Herder's *Märchen*, the influence of Arabic poetry on Provençal lyric shattered Latin's despotism and made possible a vernacular (and hence potentially secular) literature, "producing freedom of thought for all of Europe" and the first Enlightenment (*die erste Aufklärung*). "Do we not therefore owe the Provençals, and the Arabs who awakened them, a great debt?"[16]

But if for Herder the fairy tale was a happy one, for others, such as August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845), it was grim. Schlegel was willing to concede that the Arabs might have invented rhyme, but he insisted that they were too "cruel" to have discovered its highest use, the love lyric. He was an adamant defender of the rest of Europe against any claim of Islamic influence: "Muhammad's sect never had the slightest influence on anything that constitutes the original genius of the Middle Ages."[17]

Did the meeting of religious cultures in Iberia produce love or cruelty? The question was already old by the time these German forefathers of Romanticism tilted quills. One of its most powerful versions took the form of what came to be called in Spanish the *leyenda negra*, or black legend: the idea, widespread among Spain's European enemies, that Spanish Christianity was corrupted by its long contact and conflict with Islam and Judaism. It had therefore become a culture of particular cruelty, beset by the Inquisition and obsessed with purity of blood, fanatically persecuting everyone it encountered (a group that included not only Jews, Moriscos, Turks, and indigenous peoples of the Americas but also European Protestants, who played an important role in the creation and dissemination of this negative narrative beginning already in the late sixteenth century). Not surprisingly, many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century

16 Herder, *Briefe zu Berförderung der Humanität* 470: "Spanien war die glückliche Gegend, wo für Europa der erste Funke einer wiederkommenden Kultur schlug, die sich denn auch nach dem Ort und der Zeit gestalten mußte, in denen sie auflebte. Die Geschichte davon lautet wie ein angenehmes Märchen." See also 475.

17 Schlegel, *Observations* 67–69.

Spanish writers had a very different and generally much more positive sense of their nation's distinctive mission in the salvation of the world and its peoples.[18]

From the beginning of the fifteenth century to the present, both the positive and negative versions—the distinctive sense of the Iberian mission as loving, civilizing, and salvific and the critique of that mission as vicious and barbaric—could be and were expressed in terms of race. My use of the word "race" here is not anachronistic (or rather, it is less anachronistic than the use of a word like convivencia). The term *raza* was first applied to humans in the Iberian Middle Ages, near the end of the period Castro characterized as belonging to convivencia. In the late fourteenth century, shortly after the forced mass conversions of Jews to Christianity in 1391, Castilians borrowed the word from treatises about the care and breeding of horses in order to designate the stigma that attached to descendants of converts from Judaism to Christianity. By the time of Columbus's voyages the word began to be applied to the descendants of converts from Islam to Christianity and thereafter to many other populations, expanding as well to other languages. By the time the term convivencia was coined in the early twentieth century, the possibilities for narrating the history of Iberia's many peoples and empires had been thoroughly saturated by manifold ideas about race.[19]

In the 1880s, for example, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo—a scholar so influential that Spain's Real Academia de la Historia is named in his honor—did not hesitate to present his three-volume history of Iberian heterodoxy in racial terms: "It is madness to believe that *battles for existence*, bloody and centuries-long struggles between races, could end in any way other than with expulsions and exterminations. The inferior race always succumbs …" Elsewhere he opined, without intending any contradiction, that "the matter of race [by which he meant the existence of "Semitic" Jews and Muslims] explains many phenomena and resolves many enigmas in our history" and "is the principal cause of decadence of the [Iberian] Peninsula."[20] (According to him, the "Arab race" "has been and is little suited for philosophy.")

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18 For a vast collection of these views, see Hillgarth, *Mirror of Spain*.

19 For the early history of the word *raza*, as well as a more expanded treatment of the issues treated in this and the next paragraph, see Nirenberg, "Was There Race before Modernity?"

20 "Locura es pensar que *batallas por la existencia*, luchas encarnizadas y seculares de razas, terminen de otro modo que con expulsiones o exterminios. La raza inferior sucumbe siempre y acaba por triunfar el principio de nacionalidad más fuerte y vigoroso." Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* ii, 379; i, 410; ii, 381. Despite the Darwinian overtones of this passage, and though he everywhere utilizes the vocabulary of race, Menéndez y Pelayo nevertheless also claims to reject some of the racial theories of his day (cf. i, 249: "Sin asentir en manera alguna a la teoría fatalista de las razas … los árabes … han sido y son muy poco dados a la filosofía …"). Compare Lea, *History of the Inquisition* i, 126.

The school of history and philology within which Castro trained was situated within these powerful explanatory structures, although it shaped them in its own way and sometimes toward different political implications. By "school," I mean the circle of the Centro de Estudios Historicos founded in 1910 within the Junta de Ampliación de Estudios. The Centro was directed by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Castro's "maestro," and can serve here as a proxy for the many influences that shaped Castro's thought. (I say proxy, because I do not wish to imply that anyone's thought can be fully explained merely by pointing to a school or network in which they participated.)

It was within the circle of the Centro de Estudios that the Arabist Julián Ribera (and not, *pace* Wikipedia, Américo Castro) first put the term convivencia to the kind of work we are studying, in a contribution he dedicated to the twelfth-century Cordoban poet Ibn Quzmān, whose Arabic poetry incudes lines of Romance.[21] Ribera used the term to describe what he saw as an extraordinary cultural efflorescence made possible by the synthesis of the Islamic and the Christian in al-Andalus. I say cultural efflorescence, but the term convivencia was deployed in a period and a field in which the lines between culture and biology—or, for that matter, between efflorescence and degeneration—were far from clear, very different from ones we might draw today, and all subjected to the vocabulary of race.

The historian of architecture Manuel Gómez Moreno provides an early example. He was appointed to the Junta in its first years. He opened his 1919 book on Mozarabic churches—that is, churches built by Christians living under Islam in Iberia—with a summary of the history of the peninsula up to the eleventh century. He presented that history as a synthesis of Islam and Christianity whose product was a distinctive "genio de raza," or racial genius. The basic attribute of that racial genius was, according to him, to "to reason like a European and feel emotions like an oriental" ("razonar a la europea y sentir a lo oriental").[22] This distinctive fusion defined what he called "our racial personality" ("nuestra personalidad racial"), whose attributes included "genius, exclusivism, improvisations, magnificent outbursts without continuity, without adequate fruit and sometimes (*a vueltas*) with an instinct of individual anarchy."[23]

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21 Ribera y Tarragó, *Discursos leídos* 54. Ribera did not invent the term but adapted it to new usage. Sp. *convivencia* is attested as early as the seventeenth century, and Lat. *conviventia* as early as the tenth. See Szpiech, "Convivencia Wars" 137 and 153 n. 5.

22 Gómez Moreno, *Iglesias mozárabes* xi ("genio de raza"), xv ("razonar a la europea").

23 Gómez Moreno, "Lenguas hispánicas" 21: "Genialidad, exclusivismo, improvisaciones,

Castro was among the most eminent members of the second generation produced by the Centro de Estudios, along with Amado Alonso (1896–1952), Dámaso Alonso (1898–1990), and Rafael Lapesa (1908–2001). With Amado Alonso he was also one of the leaders of the school's diaspora in the wake of General Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War. Amado Alonso had been seconded by Menéndez Pidal to Buenos Aires in 1926 to open a branch of the Centro, and he remained there until General Peron's persecution drove him to Harvard in 1946. Castro left Spain later, in the wake of Franco's victories in the Spanish Civil War, spending brief periods of time in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and the United States before taking up a professorship in Princeton in 1940.

Castro's concept of convivencia was the fruit of his exile, its themes first proclaimed in his *Eintrittsvorlesung* at Princeton in 1940,[24] and its substance achieved with the publication of his *España en su historia* by Editorial Losada in Buenos Aires in 1948, the work that—along with the many expansions and re-editions of the work that Castro produced over the next 15 years of his life—brought the term convivencia into the flow of historical discourse as we know it today. It was in that work that he presented the history of Spain as a "long parenthesis" of "oriental tolerance" for the coexistence of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, an attitude he thought Islamic and not Christian ("La tolerancia española fue islámica y no cristiana"), encoded already in the Quran, though its historical instantiation he looked for and found only in Iberia from the eighth to the fifteenth century. It is this parenthesis he taught us to call convivencia.[25]

I have already detailed why academic Arabists in Spain today consider Castro's long parenthesis of oriental tolerance to be unsustainable from a historical point of view. But that criticism in no way exhausts the contributions of Castro's work, which above all insisted that the history of the Iberian world cannot be understood without attending to Islam as well as Christianity. Even more original was his claim that Judaism, too, was an important source of "Spanishness." "The history of the rest of Europe can be understood without the need to put the Jews among the first terms; but that of Spain cannot."[26] Both of these positions constituted welcome salvos against a rival strand of Castilian histori-

arranques magníficos sin continuidad, sin fruto adecuado y a vueltas con un instinto de anarquía individual."

24 Published as Castro, *Meaning of Spanish Civilization*.

25 Castro, *España en su historia* 202.

26 "La historia del resto de Europa puede entenderse sin necesidad de situar a los judíos en primer término; la de España, no": Castro, *Realidad histórica* 443. This distinction between Spain and the rest of Europe might seem extraordinarily provincial when one considers that it was written immediately after years in which much of the world had been consumed by a war motivated in part by ideas about the Jewish role in European history.

ography that sometimes emphasized that what mattered in understanding "the Spanish race" was its Christian lineage.

About Castro's thought there is much to say, and not all can fit in one sermon. It will be challenge enough to focus on our declared task, elucidating the relationship between Castro's convivencia and the racial theories of his day. That task is difficult because concepts of race in the Hispanic world of Castro's day were themselves diverse. Consider the holiday called in English Columbus Day, commemorating Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas. In the early twentieth-century Spanish-speaking world this commemoration came to be called the "Dia de la Raza" or "Dia de la Hispanidad." The holiday was Latin American as well as Iberian, and it was championed in Spain by liberals, monarchists, Falangists, and Francoists alike. This is not the place to delve into the complex reception history of the "Day of the Race," except simply to state that this history makes clear that at the time *España en su historia* was published, and in the midst of Franco's regime, ideas about race in the Iberian world could be very different from what Castro's English-speaking readers in the United States then or today might have in mind.[27]

Given the long history of race/*raza* in Spanish culture and the complexity of its meanings at the time Castro was himself writing, it is all the more curious that he invoked the word often, but only to distance himself from it rather than engage it. In fact, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that he presented his own thesis as standing in direct opposition to race, but a race hypersimplified for polemical purposes. To this end, commencing with *España en su historia*, Castro began nearly all of his books with an attack upon the relevance of the concept to Spanish history.[28]

In the opening of *The Spaniards*, for example, he explains that he speaks of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian "castes," not races, "for in that Spain of three religions everyone was light-skinned, with horizontal eyes, except for a few black slaves brought in from Africa."[29] Similarly, in the introduction to the 1965 edition of *La realidad histórica de España* he writes: "A much wider detour will be necessary in order to include in future historiography the positive and decisive presence of the Moorish and Jewish castes (not races!). Because there is notable resistance to accepting that the Spanish problem was one of castes and not of

27 See Rachum, "Origins and Significance" 69–71 on the festival's celebration in Spain. For a valuable treatment of this holiday and of the uses of the word *raza* more generally during this period, see González-Calleja and Limón-Nevado, *Hispanidad*.

28 An approach common to Castro's *España en su historia* and *La realidad historica de España* as well as *De la edad conflictiva*, *"Español," palabra extranjera*, and *The Spaniards*.

29 Castro, *Spaniards* v.

races, [a term] today applicable only to those distinguished, as the Dictionary of the Academy has it, 'by the color of their skin and other characteristics.' "[30]

It is odd to find a scholar of language and its history invoke a modern dictionary definition to characterize the past of a concept, and all the odder when he does so in such a tendentious way, taking the *Diccionario*'s definition of race as referring only to skin color (what of the more ominous "y otros caracteres"?) and even ignoring its use of the word *raza* elsewhere, as in its definition of an anti-Semite ("antisemita") as an "enemy of the Hebrew race, of its culture, or of its influence."[31] Even Castro's conjuration of an easily dismissed "true" biological racism based solely on external physical characteristics seems odd on historical grounds, since he must have been aware of the many medieval and early modern Iberian sources that invoked precisely such characteristics.[32]

Why did Castro work so hard to distance himself from the vocabulary of race? One can imagine multiple reasons. Presumably he sought to establish his differences with some Spanish scholars who did maintain that Jews and Muslims were members of races inferior to the "raza hispanica" (a view, it should be noted, that was only one of the versions of race manifested by Spanish scholars writing under Franco's regime) as part of his project bring these groups back into the mainstream of Spanish history. Or perhaps he mobilized the distinction between terms in order to protect his own essentialisms from the charges of racism that they might plausibly attract, and with which they would in fact soon be met.

In one sense, Castro's rejection of the vocabulary of race was quite up to date. Walking the streets of Princeton he might have encountered another resident of that tiny town, the anthropologist Ashley Montagu, author of UNESCO's 1950

30 Castro, *Realidad historica* 5: "Un viraje mucho más amplio será necesario para incluir en la historiografía futura la presencia positiva y decisiva de las castas (¡no razas!) mora y judía. Porque es notable la resistencia a aceptar que el problema español era de *castas* y no de *razas*, hoy sólo aplicable a quienes se distinguen, como dice el Diccionario de la Academia, 'por el color de su piel y otros caracteres.' " Writing at much the same time as Castro, N. López Martinez (in "Teologia española") embraced the vocabulary Castro rejected. He saw the fifteenth-century drive toward assimilation as "un fenómeno casi biológico" (466) and did not hesitate to speak of race: "Si añadimos la notoria eficacia de la raza hebrea para hacerse con las claves económicas del país, comprenderemos … que, a veces, por motivos inmediatos aparentemente fútiles, se haga guerra sin cuartel" (467). "Como se ve, pretendía una discriminación semejante a la que, todavía en nuestros tiempos, se basa exclusivamente en motivos de raza o del color de la piel" (468).

31 *Diccionario* s.v. "antisemita": "Enemigo de la raza hebrea, de su cultura, o de su influencia." My thanks to Daniel Waissbein for bringing this to my attention.

32 Lope de Vega pokes fun at precisely this belief in *Amar sin saber a quién* v. 10: "Largas hay con hidalguía / y muchas cortas sin ella." See Lida de Malkiel, "Lope de Vega" 88.

"Statement on Race," whose 1942 book *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* had taken up the then timely example of the Jews in order to argue that race was a purely modern concept. For centuries, Montagu wrote, "Whatever was held against them was never attributed to clearly defined biological reasons. The 'racial' interpretation is a modern 'discovery.' That is the important point to grasp. The objection to any people on 'racial' or biological grounds is virtually a purely modern innovation."[33]

We can imagine such encounters, but Castro's own footnotes give no grounds for confidence that he was reading any of the critical scholarship on the concept of race stimulated by World War II and its consequences. More likely Castro rejected race because it was a politically charged term in the Iberian "culture wars" of his day, and a key concept for some (though certainly not all) of his political rivals. But his shift from race to caste, and from war of races to convivencia, in no way lessened the essentialist assumptions that to a large extent he continued to share with those rivals. To the contrary, Castro's isolation of race in the epidermis permitted him to simply displace many of the naturalizing and essentializing functions of "race" into the less charged term of "caste."

There is in fact a close kinship between Castro's "Semitic caste" and "Semitic culture" and the thinking of earlier influential race theorists, such as Ernest Renan and his "Semitic race."[34] Both posited stable, essential, and inescapable forms of group identity continuously reproduced across time. Castro combed "Islamic" and "Jewish" texts beginning with the Quran and the Old Testament for Semitic characteristics, whose entrance into Spain he then attributed to Muslims, Jews, and *conversos*. Focusing for the moment just on the Jews, here are a few of the Jewish traits he found in later Spanish life: "Inquisitorial fanaticism and recourse to slandering informants—what one might call in Spanish 'malsinismo'—frantic greed and plundering, the concern over purity of blood … the concern with public reputation …, the desire of everyone to be a nobleman … somber asceticism …, the negative view of the world …, disillusionment, and the flight from human values." All of these, according to Castro, were the "poisons … that seeped into Spanish life, Spanish Christendom, in the increment of forced converts."[35]

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33 Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* 21–22; Beaglehole et al., *Race Question*.

34 On the racial nature of Renan's categories, see Almog, "Racial Motif."

35 The quotations are from Castro, *Structure of Spanish History* 542–543, 569. The use of the word "malsinismo" is symptomatic. It is a Castilian borrowing from the Hebrew *malshin*, meaning in the Sephardic context an informer, a Jew who denounces other Jews in Christian courts. In Castilian it came to mean any slanderer, informant, or false accuser. But

These "cultural" traits of Jews and converts are very similar to the "racial" ones listed by Renan and his disciples (who on this score included the champion of the "raza hispana" and Castro's archrival Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, as well as Manuel Gómez Moreno in 1919 and others we have already encountered).[36] They are also very similar to the "Jewish" cultural traits set out in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century anti-*converso* tracts advocating the Inquisition and *limpieza de sangre*. Nor are the means of reproduction so very different, for though Castro and his students rejected biological explanations for cultural transmission, they rely heavily on genealogical ones, frequently mapping a particular intellectual position or literary style onto a family tree in order to prove the "Semiticness" of either the idea or its exponent.[37] In short, Castro's convivencia fled from the horrifying embrace of race straight into the arms of another genetic fantasy. Small wonder that, far from having banished race and racism, Castro found himself accused of replicating it under another name.[38]

Today there are many scholars, particularly in Spain, who avoid Castro's ideas about convivencia, not only because of their historical inaccuracies, but also because of the essentialism and racism that they see buried within the concept. In their 1978 *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, for example, Abilio Barbero (1931–1990) and Marcelo Vigil (1930–1987) criticized both Castro and his rival Sánchez-Albornoz as having produced "a masquerade of the historical reality of Spain, converting it into something transcendent, tied to metaphysical and racial constants."[39] But the criticism was already made with the first publication of *España en su historia*, in 1948. In a review that appeared shortly after its publication, the linguist Yakov Malkiel, a refugee from

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where I find this passage shocking, others have found it invaluable. In his contribution to a Festschrift published in Castro's honor in 1965, Francisco Márquez Villanueva praised precisely these pages as "the most acute and fruitful of [Castro's] oeuvre." I cite from that essay's republication, "El problema de los conversos" 69.

36 The convergence was pointed out by Netanyahu in his *Toward the Inquisition* chs. 1 and 5. For a good example of Sánchez-Albornoz's agreement with Castro on this score, see his *España* ii, 16, 255.

37 Thus Márquez Villanueva, seeking to prove that (*pace* Horace) the literary figure of the procuress or go-between is a "Semitic" trope, writes of one author (Feliciano de Silva) that, although his ancestry is not certain, he "looks highly suspicious, given his marriage to a lady of known Jewish lineage and his life-long affinity with the *converso* literary milieu." See his "*La Celestina*" 452 n. 2. The association of particular intellectual positions or literary interests with "judaizing," so prominent a feature of the Inquisition, has also become a prominent strategy of essentialization among members of a particular school of Spanish philology in the United States.

38 Castro expressed surprise at this in his introduction to *The Spaniards*.

39 Barbero and Vigil, *Formación del feudalismo* 18.

Europe (his was among the last PhDs granted to a Jew in Berlin) and founder of the journal *Romance Philology* at Berkeley, rather mildly observed that Castro's approach resembled theories of cultural transmission discredited by association with National Socialism.[40]

Not long before writing that review, Malkiel had met and married María Rosa Lida (known as María Rosa Lida de Malkiel after her marriage), whom I will take the liberty of calling María Rosa, since she was my great-aunt.[41] María Rosa (1910–1962) was born in Buenos Aires to a newly immigrated Jewish family, eventually pursuing her studies in the Buenos Aires branch of the Madrid Centro de Estudios established and directed there by Amado Alonso until the rise of Juan Peron's dictatorship forced both Alonso and María Rosa to leave Argentina. She arrived in the United States in 1947, the year she completed her doctorate, and was immediately received in Américo Castro's home in Princeton, hospitality she merited not only because of her own growing reputation as a scholar, nor because she was a student of Amado Alonso, but because in Buenos Aires throughout 1946 and 1947 she had shepherded the manuscript of Castro's *España en su historia* through the editorial process at Editorial Losada.

I conclude this essay with a few pages dedicated to María Rosa's relationship with Castro's work, not out of ancestral piety but because I think that relationship reveals something important—and moving—about the history of Castro's concept of convivencia and about its entanglements with *raza* and other strategies of essentialism. To begin with, hers had not been merely an editorial role. She also contributed heavily to a number of the footnotes, corrected errors, and suggested emendations, especially where the original risked lapsing into racist topoi of the day.

The correspondence between Lida and Castro has recently been published by Juan-Carlos Conde, and in his fortunate edition of the letters one can see her introduce suggested emendations to Castro's treatment of the place of Jews in Spanish culture. "Chap. x. The Jews. Some notes to that marvelous chapter, and please believe me that I do not offer them as 'special pleading for my household' [that is, the Jews], but only out of pure love for the truth."[42]

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40 Malkiel, "Jewish Heritage."

41 On their meeting and marriage, see now the materials collected in Lida and Malkiel, *Amor y filología*, and the review by Juan-Carlos Conde.

42 Castro and Lida de Malkiel, *Laguna sumergida*. The quotation, at 198, is from MRL to AC [n.d., in response to a letter of 3 October 1936]: "Cap. x. Los judíos. Unas notas a ese maravilloso capítulo, y créame V. que no las apunto pro domo mea, sino por puro amor a la verdad." On the relationship as evidenced in the letters, see also Conde, "Historial de un libro," and Croce, "María Rosa Lida." The publication of this correspondence facilitates a more fraught evaluation of María Rosa Lida's standing in the Spanish philological com-

These emendations sought to soften some of the anti-Semitic clichés present in Castro's work. For example, where in page 274 of the proofs he had written, "They lent money with 33% annual interest," she suggested that this needed clarification: "Since this seems today exorbitant, it would be appropriate to clarify that the customary interest in the Middle Ages oscillated between 33% and 43%, and that in the sixteenth century, after the expulsion of the Jews of Naples (energetically engineered by Genoese and Florentine usurers), Christian moneylenders charged as much as 240%." She suggested he change his claim that Jews were gifted at business, and his implication that all Jews were rich, and noted, "It should also be noted that the first victim of the medieval economy was the Jew, who was despoiled much more extensively and arbitrarily than the Christian." Castro accepted some of these suggestions, which were incorporated into the footnotes of the published work. Others (such as his claim that the Jews' belief that they were the "raza eligida," or chosen race, irritated Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans alike) he defended in his reply of 3 October 1946 and did not change. In any event, he thanked her repeatedly for her labors on his behalf, which he duly acknowledged in the published volume.[43]

But the story does not end there. As María Rosa Lida developed as a scholar, Castro and his Spanish colleagues noted her independence from their school. Castro himself reacted negatively to the appearance of each of María Rosa's books. In the letters he wrote her after receiving her *Juan de Mena, poeta del prerrenacimiento español* and her *La idea de la fama en la Edad Media castellana*, he made essentially the same complaints: that she had not cited him, that she ignored his method, and that she was a positivist, too mired in details, too scholastic, too technical, too cold to be able to hear or confront "the palpitating reality that is there, screaming to be seized, sheltered, and valued," that is to say, the particular reality of the Spaniard latent in the texts.[44]

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munity than the admiring appreciation offered on the centenary of her birth by Ángel Gómez Moreno, "En el centenario de María Rosa Lida de Malkiel." (But for a precocious approach to that fraughtness, based on the epistolary archive of Rafael Lapesa, see the 2013 article of Aurora Hermida-Ruíz discussed below.)

43 "Prestaban dinero con un 33% de interés annual." "Como esto resulta hoy exorbitante, sería oportuno aclarar que el interés usual en la Edad Media oscilaba entre 33 y 43% y que, en el siglo XVI, después de la expulsión de los judíos de Nápoles (vivamente propiciada por los usureros genoveses y florentinos) los prestamistas cristianos llegaron al 240%." "También habría que recordar que la primera víctima de la economía medieval era el judío, esquilmado mucho más cuantiosa y arbitrariamente que el cristiano." Castro, *España en su historia* 15 (acknowledgment), 475 n. 1, 476 n. 2, 511 n. 1 (emendations incorporated into footnotes).

44 AC to MRL, 16 January 1951: "La realidad palpitante que está ahí, pidiendo a gritos ser asida, abrigada y valorada"; AC to MRL, 28 January 1953, after reading her *Idea de la fama*: "Ya sé

Scholars familiar with the aesthetic vocabularies of anti-Semitism in the first half of the twentieth century may already detect faint whiffs of ideas about the "Jewish race" in these criticisms. Those ideas were not absent from Castro's circle. After María Rosa published a review in 1959 that criticized some aspects of Dámaso Alonso's literary criticism, Alonso expressed himself clearly in a letter to Lapesa. "I suppose you will have read the string of insults that the Malkiel directs toward me in the *Nueva revista de filología hispana*, for the mere crime of my having courteously dissented from some sacred opinion of hers. It does not surprise me in her. From her *race* I expected it."[45]

The term I have loosely (but not arbitrarily) translated here as race is the Spanish *ralea*. This term was the twin, as the learned philologists Alonso and Castro both surely knew, of the term *raza*. But whereas *raza* derived from the breeding of horses, *ralea* referred to the pedigrees of hawks and other birds. In the words of Covarrubias's early seventeenth-century dictionary from which earlier we drew a definition of *raza*:

> *Ralea*: it is a term from falconry, equivalent in birds to what in horses we call *raça*. A man of ruinous *ralea*, a man of ruinous *casta* [caste]. I have not yet determined its etymology, but I assume it to be an Arabic word.[46]

The etymology itself provides a nice example, if another were needed, of the close proximity in the Iberian biocultural imagination of concepts such as race and caste, *ralea* and lineage, that Castro in his printed pages insisted had nothing to do with each other.

As for Castro, his frankest views about María Rosa were expressed not in his letters to her but in correspondence with others. A final example comes from a letter written after her death from a brain tumor in 1962, at the age of 52. On her deathbed she left a vast manuscript entitled *La originalidad artística de "La Celestina."* The *Celestina* is one of the canonical works of Castilian (and

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que V. persistirá en sus 'ideas' y en su Edad Media; pero si lo que V. escribe es verdad, todo lo que yo hago es mentira."

45 "Supongo que habréis leído la sarta de insultos que me dirige la Malkiel en la Nueva Revista de Filología Hispana, por el mero delito de haber disentido cortésmente de una sagrada opinión suya. No me extraña en ella: de su ralea lo esperaba." I draw the quotation from Aurora Hermida-Ruíz's insightful "María Rosa Lida" 54–55, citing from the Archivo de Rafael Lapesa Melgar de la Biblioteca de la Generalitat Valenciana (ARLM), Pro 1773 (dated 18 August 1960).

46 Sebastián de Covarrubias, *Tesoro* s.v. "ralea": "Ralea: es termino de cetreria, vale en las aues lo que en los cauallos dezimos raça. Hombre de ruin ralea, hombre de ruin casta. Hasta agora no he alcançado su etimologia, entiendo ser vocablo Arabigo."

indeed European) literature, an astonishingly original work, sometimes hailed as the origin of the novel, published in 1499 under the supposed authorship of Fernando de Rojas, a descendant of converts from Judaism. Judging from his correspondence with Lapesa, Castro hoped that in this book María Rosa would finally endorse his approach to the roles of Judaism and Islam in Spanish culture. But although María Rosa's posthumously published book never explicitly stated that it was taking aim at his views or those of his school (Castro's disciple Stephen Gilman, for example, had published his influential *The Art of the Celestina* in 1956[47]), her astonishing erudition was deployed in the service of a very different thesis that was distinctively her own.[48] Castro expressed his disappointment bluntly in a 1963 letter to Lapesa, and in characteristically essentializing terms: "Ma. Rosa absorbed nothing from my work other than what was favorable to her Jewish fervor: factoids, in a word."[49]

It is only if we demand morality from historians and their methodologies that anecdotes like as these become a relevant conclusion to an essay on *raza*, convivencia, and the perils of moralizing history. It is, after all, not a sin but a necessity that a historian's attention be only partial, since human attention is always inadequate to the complexity of the cosmos. One historian may produce a history that plausibly presents the Umayyad caliphate as the home of a distinctive pluralism constructed under Arab hegemony and collapsing under Christian rule. Another can produce a history that presents that same caliphate as the initiator of a distinctive form of Arab genealogical discrimination (against the Berbers, for example—that is, non-Arab Muslims native to North Africa), producing in turn Almohad ideas about the heritability of religious stigma that later gave birth to Christian ideas about *raza*. This is as it should be. The ability to offer multiple perspectives that can destabilize our moral and political certainties is a power appropriate to history.

But Castro sought to replace one politically charged and morally laden certainty—let us call it *raza*—with another, convivencia. It is therefore relevant that while criticizing one vocabulary of essentialism, he fell into another. He is scarcely the first and will certainly not be the last scholar whose critique of racism is blind to the potential for racism within itself. Once we perceive

47 Gilman, *Art of "La Celestina."* On the reception of Gilman's book—at least initially more influential than Lida's posthumously published work—see Deyermond, "Rereading Stephen Gilman."

48 Lida de Malkiel, *Originalidad artística*.

49 "Ma. Rosa no asimiló de mi obra sino lo favorable para su entusiasmo judaico, datos sueltos en una palabra." I quote from Hermida-Ruíz, "María Rosa Lida" 49, citing ARLM, Pro 2548 (dated 7 November 1963). For a very different (better informed but also partial and essentializing) view of Lida's "Jewish fervor," see Malkiel, "Judaic Strain."

that blindness, we might conclude that his convivencia does not serve us best as a theory by which we should want to interpret the past. It serves rather as an example of how our histories, no matter how politically well intentioned they may seem to us at a given moment or from a given perspective, can at different moments or from different perspectives serve very different regimes, including some we might come to find horrifying.

At the very least we can say that if the test of convivencia as a theory is the degree to which it opens us up to the place of the other in our own communities, then the theory failed that test among its own impresarios. My point is not simply that in their interactions with María Rosa Américo Castro, Dámaso Alonso, and some other paladins of the Centro de Estudios Historicos may have been sexist, anti-Semitic, or self-centered. We all have our failings, and the more those failings are consonant with our times, the more difficult they are for us to see. My point is rather that whatever the moral and political claims of convivencia as a methodology meant to open Christian eyes to the participation of Muslims and Jews in the construction of their cultures and identities, the methodology did not help these Iberian paladins of philology recognize the voice of a young woman, a scholar without job or affiliation (what we today call the academic precariat), a child of immigrants in Argentina and an immigrant herself in the United States, a member of a group that had just undergone mass murder in the name of racial purity.

I try to imagine how this woman experienced the prejudices of those with so much power to control the fate of her work. Perhaps the fact that she is an "ancestor," in the sense that stories about her abound in family memory and her books populate my library, gives me the illusion that through that act of empathetic imagination I can feel something akin to what she felt, and to what many might feel today as they stand at the doors of venerable institutions and powerful schools of thought. But even if it is a pious illusion, the act of imagination leads me to a methodological conclusion, namely, that whatever moral claims we might make for convivencia, they must mean little if they do not help us hear what the other can teach us about our own certainties.

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